Colchester Board of Education
Communication received regarding masks:

Beth Tiezzi: (Against)

Good morning,
I am a parent of both a kindergartner and second grader at CES. In the past two years we have been dealing with so many changes and new “rules” to follow. And while I agree masks were necessary in the beginning of the pandemic I truly believe enough is enough, especially as far as our children are concerned.

[Edited for privacy]

[redacted]

I hope you will take all of these concerns into consideration when deciding what to do now that the governor has lifted the mask mandate come February 28th. Please consider the well being of our children. Let them be children again, let them have a little bit of “normal” back. It has been long enough. If a parent feels more comfortable sending their child to school with a mask then it should fully be up to the parents to make that decision, it should no longer be a decision made by our schools.

Thank you for your consideration,
Beth Tiezzi

Megan McGloin (Against):

Good afternoon,
My name is Megan McGloin and I am the parent of a 3rd grader at JJIS. I am writing to express my thoughts on the mask mandate as a parent of a child who has spent almost her entire time in school being affected by the pandemic.

First of all, I must state that I do not envy the position you are in. Please know that my family appreciates all you have done since the beginning of this process in keeping our children safe with the information we were given and felt the communication between the superintendent, BOE and the families was constant and informative.

With the governor's recent drop of the mandate and putting it in your laps, I must say that I am in support of leaving it up to the families and whether or not they want their children in masks. From day one, we have taken Covid-19 very seriously in our house. We wore masks, we stayed home, we were all vaccinated (and adults boosted) the week we were eligible in the first available appointment we could get. We did our part in preventing the spread, recognizing that we come in contact with people more vulnerable than us on a daily basis and would never want to be responsible for someone's illness.

But as we continue to learn more about the virus, I feel we are ready to take the next step of learning to live with it and allowing our children to return to some normalcy (the same thing that has been granted to adults for some time now.) I feel lucky that we live in a state with high vaccination rates and continued drops in positivity rates and hospitalizations. I fear we are getting in to dangerous territory (and maybe already are in it) of children who are distrustful of the world around them and that everything and everyone is a danger to them. I feel sad for the children who have very very rarely seen their teachers' smiles, seen the gaps in the mouths of their friends who have lost their teeth, smiled at each for comfort and connection. So much of our communication is learned and done through nonverbals and we are doing a disservice to these kids by now allowing them to live and learn these actions.

I would never discourage a family from wearing a mask if that is what they feel is best for their family. As parents and guardians, we are the protectors of our children and we need to make decisions based on how well we know our kids. For my family, and for other families I have spoken to, I feel we are ready and able to give our kids the chance to smile and chat with each other once again.

Sincerely,

Megan McGloin

Seth Breimaier (For):

Dear Dr. Burt, Colchester BOE Members, Principal O'Meara, and Vice Principal Amado:

I hope you're all doing well. I'm disappointed that the Governor has made the decision to end the mask mandate in CT. Personally, I believe it's a massive failure in leadership that the Governor is passing the decision to individual school boards. I understand the significant pressure that puts on Dr. Burt, the Board of Education (BOE), and the principals/school staff. **I'm writing this email in strong support of keeping masks in our schools**.

My son attends Colchester Elementary School (CES). He LOVES going to school and he LOVES learning. He also absolutely loves seeing the new friends he has made this year. My wife and I agree that the best part of our day is getting to hear the stories from his school day. I also have a nephew who attends CES. I've been dropping them off and picking them up for the last 6 weeks. Each day when I pick them up, we go around the car and talk about the best and worst parts of their day. Not one time has either of them told me that wearing a mask was a problem.

I'm writing this email because I am truly scared and concerned for my family! I have a three-year-old daughter who is not eligible for a vaccine. Most importantly, my wife is 7-months pregnant. There can be significant consequences for pregnant women who contract Covid. According to the CDC, people who have COVID-19 during pregnancy are at increased risk for preterm birth (delivering the baby earlier than 37 weeks) and stillbirth; and, might be at increased risk for other pregnancy complications. The CDC also states that pregnant women are more likely to get severely ill from COVID-19 compared to people who are not pregnant. Severe illness means that a person with COVID-19 may need:

- Hospitalization
- Intensive care
- A ventilator or special equipment to help them breathe

People with COVID-19 who become severely ill can die.

It's worth pointing out that the CDC continues to recommend universal indoor masking by all students (ages 2 years and older), staff, teachers, and visitors to K-12 schools, regardless of vaccination status.

I'm doing absolutely everything I can to keep my family safe. We don't eat in restaurants. We make everyone not living in our house test before they see us. We wear KN-95 masks in absolutely every public setting that we can't avoid (e.g., supermarket, workplace, etc.). I cancelled Christmas with my family members this year because the numbers were too high. I've re-arranged my work schedule so I'm able to drop off and pick up my own child and my nephew from school everyday just so we can avoid the extra exposure on the bus.

We really need your help!

The decisions you make regarding masks in the coming weeks will have significant consequences for my family and other families with similar concerns. The decision to continue the use of masks will keep my child in school and help keep my pregnant wife, my unvaccinated

three-year-old, and my unborn daughter safe. The decision to discontinue the use of mask (contrary to current CDC recommendations) will put my family into an unthinkable dilemma where we're forced to choose between our safety and our son's education. If masks are not longer required, we will be forced to consider removing our son from the school for the remainder of this school year because it will be the only option left that allows us to keep our entire family safe.

Again, we really need your help! Thank you for taking the time to read this email.

Best,

Seth Breitmaier
[redacted] (Phone Number)
[redacted]@gmail.com

References:
Pregnant and Recently Pregnant People | CDC
Guidance for COVID-19 Prevention in K-12 Schools | CDC

Mark Wilinski (Against):

All:
I am writing this email to express my support for making the wearing of masks in Colchester Public Schools optional, coincident with the end of the statewide mandate. See, e.g., https://www.nbcconnecticut.com/news/coronavirus/governor-to-hold-news-conference-on-ct-face-mask-requirements/2712121/ for a discussion of the same. In short, and as the Governor has expressed, the infection rates are falling and vaccines are widely available to help protect those from serious illnesses. The need for continued enforcement of a mask mandate is no longer present, as the Governor has astutely recognized.

The time has long since passed since masks should have been required. Enough is enough. Beyond the health consequences/discomfort associated with restricted breathing brought about by wearing a mask for hours each day, continuing to force students to wear masks in public schools: (1) is an unnecessary restraint on their freedom and liberty, (2) raises questions in relation to the First Amendment - freedom of speech/expression, and (3) unfairly denies parents the right to make individual choices that best serve their respective families.

It must be borne in mind that an end to the mandate does not in any way require students, teachers, administrators, staff, etc., to forego wearing masks, which is to say that those that would like to continue wearing masks may freely choose to do so. Those that are especially concerned may be encouraged to "double" or even "triple" mask as they see fit.

Best Regards,

Mark Wilinski
63 Brookstone Dr.
Colchester, CT 06415

Edward & Diane Peck (Against):

Good Morning,
We can only assume that you have been bombarded with emails stating why parents are either for or against the end of “mask mandates” in Colchester Public Schools. As parents of three children currently enrolled in Colchester Public Schools, we will spare you another long winded letter as to the reasons behind our beliefs, but we do want to go on record as stating we STRONGLY oppose the “mask mandate” and URGE YOU to let individual families decide what best suits their needs… whether or not they want their children to continue to wear masks to school, or attend school mask free, whether vaccinated or not vaccinated. Enough is enough, PLEASE! It is well past time to STOP indoctrinating students and let us as parents decide what we believe is in the best interest of our own children!

Thank you for your consideration.
Edward and Diane Peck

Khara Dean (Against):

Hello- I just wanted to take a moment to thank you for all you and the teachers have done over the past two years. As a mom of 3 and pediatric nurse, I also know how draining it all has been.

I also wanted to ask you to please consider dropping the mask mandate or making it optional for parents to decide. Two years of covering our children’s faces has had a deep impact and it’s time to end it.

These mandates have been very taxing on parents and children. I know many parents who feel the same way. In fact I have talked to many who agree if the mask mandates and/or vaccine mandates are in place next year they will homeschool. I agree and have already been in discussions with teachers from your district who are wanting to leave and start private teaching to homeschool pods.

I know you have a lot of options to weigh. But I hope you can leave some of these decisions up to parents in the future. Thank you for your time and again for all your hard work.

Khara Dean [redacted]

Alycia Fecteau (Against):

I know you guys have an important decision to make in the near future. I do not envy your position especially in this climate. However, as a parent In The school system I'd like to throw in my two cents.

I have 2 children in the school system. They are vaccinated, in good health, and wear masks without complaint daily. However, I do think it is time to end mandatory masking in schools. My youngest like many kids, has never had a normal school year. I will admit that it does make me somewhat anxious to have them unmasked but I can't let my anxiety affect what is best for my children.

I am going to attach a link to the website about the urgency for normalcy. Please read their tool kit. They provide lots of evidence and reasons all in one place that our children desperately not only need a return to normalcy but that the risk of COVID 19 to them at this point is low. We have a vaccine available, so many have been infected with omicron, and risk to children is low. This website is not so propaganda but from many qualified infectious disease Drs.

Website:
https://www.urgencyofnormal.com/advocacy-toolkit/the-toolkit

Link to download the toolkit
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/61e5afd7a33d334ec9f84595/t/61f9dd43ba8eb711feb3c039/1643765060412/Urgency+of+Normal+Toolkit.pdf

Thank you for reading. Good luck!
Alycia Fecteau

Ashley LaParre (Against):

Hello all,
My name is Ashley LaParre and I have a first grader and 3rd grader in this wonderful district. First of all, I want to thank you for all your hard work you have done and continue to do during this pandemic. As an educator and a parent that participated on a couple committees over the summer, I witnessed a small piece of your endless hours of work, as well as your dedication to our students and the teachers.

I know the upcoming decision about the mask mandate in schools will not be easy. I am also aware that you will never make everyone happy. Therefore, I wish you the best of luck and thank you for taking the time to listen to my thoughts.

When decision time comes, I truly hope you allow parents to decide what is best for their children by lifting the mandate. Lifting the mandate allows for choice. Families / Teachers still have the choice to wear a mask. If the mandate stays in place there is no choice. If parents don't have the choice now, I ask what are we waiting for? What will allow for this change? We know the virus is not going anywhere and we know we need to move forward.

The last time my first grader had a school year with no mask was in pre-k 3! One small , tiny example of how it's affected him (without even realizing) follows. Half way through Kindergarten he came home and said my teacher is the best ! She's so nice . But I didn't know that because she has "scary eyes". I was scared. It stopped me in my tracks. I realized of course this is scary to a 5 year old ! He can ONLY see his teacher's eyes. And although he had the kindest , sweetest teacher, the physical appearance of a mask was super scary! One tiny example of how it affected my third grader (whose last full normal school year was kindergarten!) is as follows. She got quarantined this year right before winter break and was crushed! Tears rolled down her eyes , for so many reasons, as I picked her up! The thing that crushed my husband and I was how she described the situation. She said , "the principal came in and asked for the seating chart , so right away I knew it was about covid and quarantining. Then when the names started getting called to go to office/home, I realized it was the lunch room and I was going to be called because of where I sat." The fact that my daughter's brain immediately worked through this situation in these terms was very disheartening.

In closing, I feel like at this point masks are hurting our kids socially, emotionally and academically but I understand that everyone's situation is different and some might disagree with me. Therefore I strongly urge you to remove the mask mandate which would allow everyone to make their own decision. I ask you to allow families and teachers to choose what they are comfortable with. The time is now!

Thank you again for your dedication and time!

Thanks,
Ashley LaParre

Alyson Darvas (Against):

Good morning,

I am a parent of both middle school student at William J. Johnston and a First grader at CES. In the past two years we have been dealing with so many changes and as a result so much of it has created a general anxiety that will take years to repair.

[Edited for privacy]

[redacted]

We have created a completely sterile environment and while in some ways, that has been great...this will be the first year we didn't get a stomach bug or flu...it is also a negative because we have created this paranoia and the anxiety to accompany it. If we need to continue to distance, that is understandable. But masking everyone to the point we are unrecognizable and we can't see a smiling face or hear each other speak clearly, we are going too far.

With that said it only makes sense that there should no longer be a mask mandate within our schools. It should be completely left up to the parents decision whether they want their child to wear a mask or not. As well, I believe it should be up to our teachers if they themselves want to continue to wear one as well.

I hope you will take all of these concerns into consideration when deciding what to do now that the governor has lifted the mask mandate come February 28th. Please consider the well being of our children. Let them be children again, let them have a little bit of “normal” back. It has been long enough. If a parent feels more comfortable sending their child to school with a mask then it should fully be up to the parents to make that decision, it should no longer be a decision made by our schools.

Thank you for your consideration.

Amanda Seals (For):

Good morning,

I am a parent of a second grader and a first grader at CES. I am also a first grade teacher in another school district. I am writing today to communicate my opinion on the mask policy in public schools. I know you are not taking this decision lightly and thank you for seeking questions and input via the upcoming meeting.

The pandemic is not over. While we are in a much better place than we were even a few months ago, we are not through the woods yet.

I also ask you to please take teacher opinion and input into account. The last two years have not been easy mentally or physically on educators devoted to educating our town’s children. Their comfort and safety should be considered. We need the people who are caring for our children to feel comfortable in order for all to be successful.

According to https://data.ct.gov/Health-and-Human-Services/COVID-19-Vaccinations-by-Town-and-Age-Group/gngw-ukpw, as of 2/2/2022 only 33.49 percent of Colchester’s children aged 5-11 are fully vaccinated. To compare, 76.95 percent of adults ages 25-44 and 80.97 percent of adults ages 45-64 are fully vaccinated. Every parent has the right to decide what is right for their child but

as a parent of a child with asthma , this number is concerning. I urge you decision makers to wait to end the current mask policy until this percentage is higher.

Thank you for your time,

Amanda Seals

Kristen & Paul Norige (Against):

Good Evening,

In anticipation of next week's BOE meeting, I would encourage you all to create an electronic survey (google works great) to send to all Colchester families regarding unmasking our children. This data would be beneficial for all since no other metrics are in place in making this decision for the town.

I will be following up with a separate email requesting Colchester families the ability to make their own masking decisions versus the Superintendent or BOE. Families should not be forced to follow guidance from the BOE as you are not scientists, epidemiologists or virologists. Please take this into consideration.

Thank you,
Kristen and Paul Norige
Colchester Parents

Hi Jessica,

I am okay with you sharing my communication on requesting a parent survey, however, I would prefer if you shared a more detailed email I am currently drafting specific to unmasking our kids/parents choice. I should have this finalized by early next week.

Thank you,

Kristen Norige

Full Statement from Kristen Norige:

To Colchester CT Superintendent and Board of Education,

My name is Kristen Norige and our family has 2 children in the Colchester public school district. Thank you for this opportunity for our voices to be heard within the Colchester community on this matter.

At this point, the Governor has cowardly placed the decision on masking to you, our local Superintendent and BOE.

Superintendents and our BOE never originally implemented the mask mandate, therefore this authority and decision should not be determined by you. You are not scientists, virologists, epidemiologists or data analysts, and most importantly, you are not the parents of our children, which is the most important job title above all and who should and will ultimately decide on masking for their family when the Governor's mandate ends.

Children are least at risk for severe illness from COVID-19 but are sadly incurring the most impacts by mask mandates, contributing to more of an education pandemic versus a health pandemic, given our current state and what we know about COVID. I urge you all to look at the data from other states that never implemented mask mandates in schools, or have already lifted their mandate and then ask yourself, why are we still doing this to our children. Also, did any of you watch the Super Bowl this weekend? I think you get my point….and can certainly understand parent frustrations when the next day comes and our kids are still going to school with masks on.

If we are following science, the data clearly shows the mandate needs to end without relying on parent survey results.

Please be well aware that as I encourage changes to the mask mandate and other school requirements created by masking, this does not indicate or takeaway the severity and public health crisis COVID reeked havoc on but rather to update policies/mandates as vaccines, testing, data and other protective measure are widely available. We have reached a point where we need to reassess risks versus benefits of masking in our school and stop all politics around this issue, as our children are the ones being highly impacted for someone else's political gain. On both sides of this debate, you will hear the commonality of love we have for our children and wanting what's best for them, which is easily satisfied by making masks optional for families in Colchester.

Data:

Positive student cases per month since September 2021: (Based on total student population of 2,272) and positive cases reported

September: 0.00528 %

October: 0. 00660 %

November: 0.02949 %

December: 0.02113 %

January: Data pending (*extreme decline in positive cases)

February: Data Pending (*extreme decline in positive cases)

While:

- 93% CT received at least one dose of vaccine

- 77% of CT is fully vaccinated

- 81% of Colchester received at least one dose of vaccine

- 76% Colchester is fully vaccinated

- 95% of teachers and staff are fully vaccinated (See Jeffrey Burt's email dated 12/23/21)

- Children are less susceptible to severe illness from COVID (see CDC and WHO websites)
~ 0.02% hospitalizations rate (ages 0-17) from 2020 to 2022

- Despite masking children for 2 years, countless viruses/common colds with the same rate of viral transmission (or less) and mirroring the same list of COVID symptoms, continue to circulate within schools, reducing overall confidence in masks and if they are even being worn correctly

- Masking is not sanitary for 7+ hours in a day (infections, irritations, mold, fungi)

- "The sudden onset of COVID-19 compelled adoption of mask mandates before efficacy could be evaluated. Our findings do not support the hypothesis that greater public mask use decreases COVID-19 spread. As masks have been required in many settings, it is prudent to weigh potential benefits with harms. In conclusion, we found mask mandates and use to be poor predictors of COVID-19 spread in US states.

Negative Impacts of Masking:

- Unseen formation of sounds/words and facial expressions/cues, critical to social, emotional and speech development (amplified more for special needs children).

- Sign language used in classrooms in place of verbalizing wants/needs

- Media/tv used during lunch to deter students from socializing, contributing to unfinished or uneaten lunch

- Although not a consistent practice amongst teachers/staff, the following has occurred:

  ~ Recess time taken away if child continues to talk when unmasked

  ~ Snacks taken away if child talks when unmasked

Protective Measures/Resources:

- Vaccine access for all ages (those who are 5+, and soon eligible under 5)

- Natural immunity

- Combination of vaccination and natural immunity

- Testing at home convenience

- Testing site locations

- Facial coverings (if desired)

Thank you for your time.

Kristen Norige

Kris Nowakowski (Against):

Dear Colchester BOE,

Having two children in the CPS school system, I'm writing in regards to Governor Lamont's recent school mask mandate announcement. I'm asking the board to put the well being of Colchester school children first and leave the choice of mask/no mask with whom it rightly belongs, the parents.

Sincerely,

Kris Nowakowski

Courtney Kaur (For):

Good afternoon,

I am beyond sure you are being inundated with emails regarding the mask mandate. This week my husband is on on shift not allowing me to attend the special board meeting regarding masks. Even via phone the chaos of four kids would keep me from being able to actively listen/participate. I know there are a lot opinions on the matter. It is my hope we continue with masks for a little longer.

I contacted my pediatrician and asked him his professional opinion. He believes it is still too early to take the masks away. I personally agree with that. My family of 6 has been able to avoid Covid up until this point, largely impart to our diligent mask wearing. That’s 4 kids under 8 and a husband who has been an essential worker from the beginning. I understand that won’t always be true and at some point we too will test positive.

I feel you can't remove the only protection allowed and keep a quarantine. That seems a bit like putting the cart before the horse. My child can have the flu and turn around and be back to school 24 hours post fever. But with Covid is out for 5 days with nothing more than congestion. If we are being told this variant isn't dangerous enough to continue with masks then it shouldn't require a quarantine.

Leaving the decision of masking up to the parent also puts increased pressure on the teachers. I will continue to require my children to wear masks until we are further through the sick season. My kids have never cared about wearing masks because I never made it a big deal. I do know once peers aren't wearing them it will become more complicated. Then I'm having to rely on teachers to be sure my children continue to wear their masks. Which becomes increasingly more difficult to explain to a 6 year old vaccinated child why their friend doesn't have to wear a mask but they have to (being I still have two too young to receive a vaccine).

I understand we are moving forward and at some point sooner rather than later masks will be removed. It does however seem premature to remove them as we are continuing to see significant positives in our school system. I would hope by April we would see numbers that would comfortably allow even pro mask individuals like myself to find comfort in removing both quarantine and masking.

Thank you for taking the time to read this email.

Sincerely,

Courtney Kaur

Jeffery Blumberger (Against):

Dear Board of Education,

This letter is to voice my opinion on the mask mandate removal.

Now that the Governor has decided to let the choice fall to each town, I will hope you all decide to make the right choice and discontinue the mandate. After 2 years of abiding by the rules, regulations and mandates of mask wearing, it is high time to give the students, our children their freedom back.

The wearing of masks is a futile attempt at safety. The only purpose is control.

The effects of this have been very detrimental to our students. We have all suffered and abided along with the requirements for the past 2 years, but it is time to take them off and allow our students to resume a semblance of normalcy.

Do not let the teacher union dictate the choice.

The bottom line is remove the mask mandate. If students, teachers or faculty are uncomfortable, they will always have the option to continue wearing a mask if they prefer.

Please be the ones to bestow this freedom back to our students.

I thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Blumberger

Michael Dubreuil (Against):

To: Colchester Board of Education Subject: Mask Wearing in School

In 2020 to confront COVID this board adopted a School Reopening Plan. This plan was designed by state experts and included learning models: In-Person Learning, Hybrid Learning, and Remote Learning. Each model would dictate how many children would be in the classroom based on COVID-19 community spread.

In the Fall of 2020, Colchester Schools opened in the “Hybrid Learning” model. This was, however, not actually following the plan. The community spread of COVID-19 was sufficiently low to be in the full In-Person Learning model. On October 18, 2020 I sent the board an email and in summary it stated: follow the plan, go into full In-Person Learning. Shortly after this email the district went to full-in person learning; the kids were back in school.

To be honest, I don’t have much faith in the COVID experts. I didn’t actually believe in the arbitrary metrics set forth in the School Reopening Plan. I was just using the Plan as a tool to get our kids back into school.

What followed was somewhat unexpected. As we entered the Winter season COVID cases in our community spiked. We were now outside the metrics that would favor full In-Person learning. However, this board did not waiver, we have remained in the Full In-Person learning model and never entered into a different model. This board ignored the plan, you ignored the experts. For your disobedience to the experts, the Colchester citizens have benefited and this board should be commended.

We now have two years of COVID-19 data. The dangers of COVID-19 to children is statistically insignificant and comparable to the risk of flu. On April 29, 2021 an article was published in Frontiers in Pediatrics titled, “COVID-19 in Immunosuppressed Children.” In the conclusion of the article they stated, “immunosuppression might be not detrimental or even advantageous in SARS-CoV-2 infection.” Therefore, immunocompromised children fare no worse off than healthy children with regards to COVID-19… it’s like the flu.

From a public policy perspective, this pandemic should have been over last year when the vaccine was widely available to adults.The true risk of COVID-19 is to the elderly and adults with comorbidities… It was never dangerous to children.

Now, let's move to the masks…

The Connecticut Education Association's president, Kate Dias, has recently stated the following on mask use in school: "First, a science-based decision. One that relies on the Department of Public Health and CDC to establish standards based on when vaccination rates are high enough, positivity is low enough, and hospital rates are stable enough to deem masks optional. Second, a little time so that the weather is warm enough for us to open windows in our classrooms." Let me dissect the problems with her statement and how it applies to Colchester:

A.) On Vaccines:

1. If you're an adult, you should have already received a COVID-19 vaccine and if you haven't it's your personal choice.
2. If you're a child, statistically COVID-19 is simply not dangerous to you.
3. We now know that even if you are vaccinated, you can still acquire and transmit COVID-19. Therefore, the vaccination rate is a useless metric.

B.) On the "Department of Public Health and CDC to establish standards".

1. After 2 years, many of us don't trust these "health experts"; for example, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease Director, Dr. Anthony Faucci. The people she is suggesting we follow are less impressive than Dr. Faucci.
2. This board ignored the expert's standards when we stayed in Full In-Person Learning; and we were better off for it.

C.) Making the decision based on when the "weather is warm"

1. Another person believed that COVID-19 would go away when the weather was warm; it was April of 2020 and that person was President Donald Trump. I don't believe that statement worked out well for him.
2. The major problem with this thinking is that COVID-19 is not going away- it's with us forever. We will not beat the pandemic. Recently Vermont's Health Commissioner, Mark Levine, said "Many of us in public health believe Omicron has hastened our pathway to the endemic state, meaning a time when the virus is constantly present in our population, a permanent or hopefully milder part of our lives."

D.) On Hospital Rates

1. Often the people who use this statistic ignore the demographics of who is actually in the hospital. The majority of hospitalized patients are unvaccinated adults or the elderly.

2. On January 6, 2022, during the spike of cases due to the Omicron variant the CT Mirror ran an article on COVID-19 hospitalized children and stated, “An average of 21 children per day were hospitalized across the state last week.”

It’s worth noting that the media usually never reports percentages of the population in these stories. However, I think it’s important to critically think about the numbers. In July of 2021 the US Census estimated there were approximately 735,542 children in Connecticut. Therefore at the height of the pandemic 0.0028% of children were hospitalized with COVID-19; that’s 1 in 35,000 children. That number is so low that it’s more about sensational media coverage than an actual health crisis.

E.) Let me dissect the science of mask wearing

1. We all know the vast majority of us, including children in schools, wear cloth masks. Cloth masks have been a CDC approved method of controlling the pandemic; however, these cloth masks are not medical personal protective equipment.
2. In December of 2021, CNN’s Medical Expert Dr. Leana Wen said, “Cloth masks are little more than facial decorations.”
3. In the Spring of 2021, the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienists’ Pandemic Response Task Force published a study comparing the transmission time of COVID-19 when individuals were wearing masks. It should be noted that this is for the original COVID-19 variant and not the subsequent more transmittable variants. In this report they concluded:
    - If both individuals were wearing no mask, the transmission time is 15 minutes.
    - If both individuals were wearing cloth masks, the transmission time is 27 minutes.

Therefore, cloth masks are unnecessary for durations less than 15 minutes and useless for durations greater than 27 minutes. Just think about the applicability of those constraints on a school environment; only under exceptionally rare circumstances would cloth mask wearing actually be useful.

4. Many supporters of mask wearing indicate it’s “just a mask” and doesn’t impact a child’s development. Prior to the pandemic there were studies that indicated it was essential for childhood development to see faces and especially mouths; it wasn’t revolutionary and seemed fairly common sense. During the pandemic we started seeing articles that wearing masks had no impact on development. These articles weren’t believable then and now we’re beginning to see the results of these ineffective policies. In August of 2021 researchers from Brown University published a paper titled “Impact of the

COVID-19 Pandemic on Early Child Cognitive Development: Initial Findings in a Longitudinal Observational Study of Child Health.” Here’s some of those findings:

- “masks worn in public settings and in school or daycare settings may impact a range of early developing skills, such as attachment, facial processing, and socioemotional processing”

- “Comparing yearly mean scores since 2011, controlling for age, gender, demographic, and socioeconomic indicators, we find striking evidence of declining overall cognitive functioning in children beginning in 2020 and continuing through 2021.”

I would submit to you that there is no positive benefit in continuing a mask mandate. We've been using ineffective masks for two years. During those two years of ineffective mask wearing we have not seen the school environment was a significant source of COVID-19 spread.

However, we can use our common sense and read the more recent articles indicating mask wearing has caused significant negative effects. I would recommend the board make mask wearing optional for all adults and children on school property regardless of vaccination status.

In light of recent events, I think it's time that we start seeing each other's faces, to start seeing each other as humans once again.

Thank you.

Michael Dubreuil
180 Woodbine Rd, Colchester, CT 06415

Message Sent to 1st Selectman, Forwarded to BOE:

Robert Lenge, Jr.

Andreas,

Appreciate the continual updates from your office on town happenings. I've been especially interested in the recent events and applaud your efforts to get to the truth. Our kids health and opportunity to provide parents choice in addressing COVID risks is also of great interest for me and I am greatly disappointed in Mr. Burt's choice to delay tomorrows special BOE meeting. I am reaching out (as I also reached out to Mr Burt) to see if there is something I can do or perhaps you can to help push this discussion forward as I feel it is critical for our kids as we look towards the second half of the school year. Thanks again for the work you have done as first selectman.

Robert

Jennifer Cox (Parent) & Zoey Walters (WJ Student) (Against):

Hello Superintendent Burt, Chairman Oliphant, and the Colchester Board of Education,

My daughter brought up the mask mandate and we discussed what her opinion was on the subject. I told her that the opinion of the teachers and students should be the most important in the decision. She decided, on her own, to write a letter to the Superintendent. I have attached it to this email.

Thank you,

Jennifer Cox, Mom to Zoey Walter, seventh grader at WJJMS

February 13, 2022

Jeffrey Burt
Colchester, Superintendent of Schools
127 Norwich Avenue, Suite 202
Colchester, CT 06415

Alexander Oliphant
31 Heatherwood Drive
Colchester, CT 06415

Dear Superintendent Burt, Chairman Oliphant, and the Board of Education,

My name is Zoey Walter and I am a student at WJJMS. I heard about the possibility of the mask mandate being lifted and I just wanted to share what I think. I believe that mask wearing should be a student's and parent's choice, as long as the student in vaccinated. I think it is a matter of how comfortable the student is with Covid or not. If a student doesn't want to wear a mask or has trouble breathing in it then they should be able to decide.

Thank you,

Zoey Walter, seventh grade

Colchester Public Schools - 2/24/2022
Messages sent to the superintendent regarding masks:

Lea Poresky (Against)
Hello Superintendent,

Thank you for putting out the survey regarding masks in schools. Even though I filled it out, I wanted to follow up with an email. I know you're busy so I will try to keep it brief.
I appreciate all of the hard work you've done in the district these past 2 years with the added burden of COVID. As a mom of 3 young children and a 3rd grade teacher myself, I know how difficult it's been.

My family is extremely hopeful that the mask mandate will be lifted at the end of the month. It's time for families to decide what is best for their children. I have seen first-hand the detrimental social-emotional impact mask-wearing has had. I've noticed an increase in anxiety, worry, fear, and while it's easy to say "kids are resilient" this is not normal or fair to them. Children need to be able to communicate clearly and effectively. It's difficult to speak, hear and not see facial expressions. The masks are dirty and a distraction to many. With vaccines and herd immunity, along with the very low threat to children, it's time to make masks optional.

I'm speaking on behalf of several families in town that are ready for this change and to begin to give their children the normalcy at school that they so greatly deserve. There is an excitement from my own children and students talking about "not having to wear a mask anymore." If the districts are able to make these decisions, please consider allowing parents to decide whether or not to mask their kids.

Thank you for your time,
Lea

Courtney Kaur (For)
Good afternoon,
I am beyond sure you are being inundated with emails regarding the mask mandate. I know there are a lot opinions on the matter. It is my hope we continue with masks for a little longer.
I contacted my pediatrician and asked him his professional opinion. He believes it is still too early to take the masks away. I personally agree with that. My family of 6 has been able to avoid Covid up until this point, largely impart to our diligent mask wearing. That's 4 kids under 8 and a husband who has been an essential worker from the beginning. I understand that won't always be true and at some point we too will test positive.
I feel you can't remove the only protection allowed and keep a quarantine. That seems a bit like putting the cart before the horse. My child can have the flu and turn around and be back to

school 24 hours post fever. But with Covid is out for 5 days with nothing more than congestion. If we are being told this variant isn't dangerous enough to continue with masks then it shouldn't require a quarantine.

Leaving the decision of masking up to the parent also puts increased pressure on the teachers. I will continue to require my children to wear masks until we are further through the sick season. My kids have never cared about wearing masks because I never made it a big deal. I do know once peers aren't wearing them it will become more complicated. Then I'm having to rely on teachers to be sure my children continue to wear their masks. Which becomes increasingly more difficult to explain to a 6 year old vaccinated child why their friend doesn't have to wear a mask but they have to (being I still have two too young to receive a vaccine).

I understand we are moving forward and at some point sooner rather than later masks will be removed. It does however seem premature to remove them as we are continuing to see significant positives in our school system. I would hope by April we would see numbers that would comfortably allow even pro mask individuals like myself to find comfort in removing both quarantine and masking.

Thank you for taking the time to read this email.

Sincerely,
Courtney Kaur

Todd Szoka (For)

Superintendent Burt,
As the parent of both a first grader, and a 3 year old who is, as of yet, ineligible for vaccination, I am writing to ask that the school mask mandate remain in place in Colchester Public Schools for the remainder of the school year.
The CDC is still very clear in its recommendations for universal masking in grades K-12. Masking, in addition to vaccination, remains our best defense in keeping our schools a safe learning environment.
We have the low numbers we do in Connecticut because we have been doing the right things throughout the pandemic. Let's finish this school year continuing to do the right things for our children and families.
Thank You,
Todd Szoka

Kristen Norige (Against)

Good Afternoon,
The Governor has cowardly left this decision in your hands and at this point, It should be every parents choice. Enough is enough.
Thank you,
Kristen Norige

Val Murphy (Against)

Good morning, im writing you to ask that you'd leave the masks up to the parents decision. My kids have been more sick these past 2 years than ever and I feel like breathing into those masks all day are a contributing factor. Thanks so much.

Val Murphy

Jaime Hunt (Against)

Mr. Burt,

My son goes to CES and I am emailing you in hopes CPS says no to the need of the mask mandate at the end of this month. It should not be up to the school or the state but up to the parents to decide. Please allow parents to make the choice for their health of their children. Vaccination status should not matter and should be up to each parent to make that decision only.
Thank you.

Bronson Dean (Against)

Hello, my name is Bronson Dean. A parent of three in Colchester with two kids in school currently. First, I would like say thank you for all you and the teachers have done these past few years as I'm sure it has been nothing short of stressful. Second, I would ask that the board consider eliminating the mask mandate for our kids come February 28 when Gov Lamont is removing the government mask mandate and leaving it up to local officials. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely, Bronson Dean

Lynn Dickey (Against)

Please consider stopping the mandate for our children to wear masks to school. This has gone on for too long.

Thank you

Lynn Dickey

Regina Civardi (Against)

Good morning Superintendent Burt,

I send this email as a mom who kept her 3 children home last school year. We opted for voluntary at home learning for the year instead of in-person learning, due to my concerns about having my 3, 5, and 8 year old children wear masks for their almost 7 hour long school day. This year, I sent them all to in-person school hoping that a change in the mask policy would arise.
Well, yesterday I finally received that glimmer of hope!
It is now up to you to allow the children in our district to breath freely, speak clearly, see each other's smiles, and learn in a normal school environment.
I plead with you to allow these basic human rights for all of our children.
I'd also like to add that I oppose any policy put into place that would differentiate between vaccinated and unvaccinated children.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Regina Civardi
Colchester

Lauren Miller (Against)

Hi Mr. Jeffrey Burt,

I am writing this email to express my concerns about continuing the mask mandate after the governor has lifted the state mandate for schools and daycares.

As a parent and educator, I am deeply saddened that our children and students have had to deal with all of the consequences of the pandemic for the past two years. As you know, there are too many to list. I do not have much of a say in what happens after February 28th. However, I am asking that you keep the best interest of students in mind when making a decision on masking our children.

I have read your email about waiting for direction from the State Department Of Education and CT-DPH. I have also read a statement from the DPH that the state mandate is over and the mandates are being left up to the school districts. I know during the BOE meeting tonight, you mentioned you are waiting to hear from them but I'm just curious how that will impact the decision since it's left up to the district and not the DPH.

Hopefully they do not have any plans to make ridiculous recommendations for masking our kids. It should be up to parents. My child is in Kindergarten and really doesn't know any better, which is pretty sad. The children are walking around and are not able to read facial expressions, see faces of familiar people and friends, and on top of it, are not allowed to socialize with their friends at lunch or snack. It's hard to understand what the kids are saying, especially at such a young age. I feel for the educators and children who are forced to be masked all day. It is 100% impacting their learning. I have spoken with many educators who are seeing the negative academic impacts masks are causing, especially kids who are learning to speak, and read.

I also am aware that some families and staff are against removing masks but at this point, they have all of the tools out there to protect themselves, if they still think that COVID presents such a big risk to them. Unfortunately Covid is here to stay. It has over a 95% survival rate and is not a threat to 99% of children.

Please help be a voice for us and stand up for what is right. When making the decision, please consider leaving masks up to parents and families. We need to get over this and move on. It's time that our children get back to normal.

Thanks,

Lauren Miller

M/M Christoff (Against)

Dear Leaders and Decision-Makers,
We won't vote for ANYONE who supports the mask mandate for children in schools. Please support mask choice for our children and for the end of Governor Lamont's mandate of masks in schools. Please support parents to have a CHOICE in the decision.
With that said, we ask you to give parents the option to decide what is best for their children. We need your help removing this mask mandate.
Sincerely,
Michael and Stephanie Christoff
Concerned Parents

Khara Dean (Against)

Hello- I just wanted to take a moment to thank you for all you and the teachers have done over the past two years. As a mom of 3 and pediatric nurse, I also know how draining it all has been.

I also wanted to ask you to please consider dropping the mask mandate(when and if Lamont allows it) or making it optional for parents to decide. Two years of covering our children's faces has had a deep impact and it's time to end it.

These mandates have been very taxing on parents and children. I know many parents who feel the same way. In fact I have talked to many who agree if the mask mandates and/or vaccine mandates are in place next year they will homeschool. I agree and have already been in discussions with teachers from your district who are wanting to leave and start private teaching to homeschool pods.

I know you have a lot of options to weigh. But I hope you can leave some of these decisions up to parents in the future. Thank you for your time and again for all your hard work.

Khara Dean

M/M Courtemanche (For)

We beg that the BOE not remove the mask mandate on Feb 28th. Cases are still high in town, the state, and the country. School is supposed to be a safe place and our kid doesn't feel safe right now if everyone is unmasked. He currently wears a disposable 3-later mask but asked for N95s in case the mask mandate is gone in a few weeks.

We've seen many public health experts saying that it's too early for masks to be gone.

Thank you,

Rachel & Brian